

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: THIS LIFE IS A PROBATION

Scripture: Book of Mormon, Alma 9:38-41.

Now we see that Adam did fall by the partaking of the forbidden fruit, according to the word of God; and thus we see by his fall, all mankind became a lost and a fallen people. And now behold, I say unto you, that if it had been possible for Adam to have partaken of the fruit of the tree of life at that time, there would have been no death, and the word would have been void, making God a liar: for he said, If thou eat, thou shalt surely die. And we see that death comes upon mankind, yea, the death which has been spoken of by Amulek, which is the temporal death; nevertheless, there was a space granted unto man, in which he might repent; Therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead.

Wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God ... and transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state.

As long as man lives in time, it seems obvious that he will be periodically confronted by deadlines. Taxes must be paid by a certain date. Newspapers, magazines, books, and radio programs must be ready by a certain time. There is a deadline beyond which it is unsafe and unwise to plant crops, lest there be insufficient growing season to produce a harvest before a change in the season. We have a certain length of time to teach, to guide, to train, and to enjoy the association of our children; then almost before we know it they have gone away to college, and it is too late to do any more.

There is one final deadline which every man some day has to meet. That is the experience which we call death, which ends our cycle of life in this mortal body. When that hour strikes, it means that whether we are ready or not, we have to close the books on all earthly business. No matter how many plans for the future we still have, no matter how much unfinished business, we can do no more. Whatever life beyond the grave holds for us, the end of our earthly life is a deadline marking the end of a period of opportunity which can never be lived again.

When we view the shortness of life against the background of an endless eternity, we maybe constrained to question why we are granted life on this earth at all. Just as we begin to learn how to

live, we approach the deadline of death. What is the purpose or meaning of our short three score years and ten of life?

The Book of Mormon says quite plainly what the Bible says by implication -- that this life is a probation. It is a time in which we prove ourselves, in which we decide what kind of persons we want to be. It is the time in which we fix and set the limits for our progress, advancement, and continued learning in eternity. It is the time during which we shape our character, and build into it either those qualities that will endure, or those which will be destroyed in the fires of judgment.

Why do we need this period of probation? Again the Book of Mormon gives us a very simple, understandable, and reasonable doctrine. When our first parents sinned in the Garden of Eden, they came under the sentence of death, the consequences of which were passed on to all their posterity. That death was twofold. It consisted first of an immediate banishment from the presence of God, which was a spiritual death. In his sinful state man could nevermore look upon the face of God and feel at home, or be able to remain in his presence.

Besides the forbidden tree, there was in the Garden of Eden another tree, called the tree of life. Man had not been forbidden to eat of this tree in his

innocent state, before the fall. But if he had been allowed to eat of the tree of life after the fall, his body would have become immortal; and he would have lived forever in spiritual death, separated from God, with no way of release from a sinful but immortal body, and no way to come again into God's presence. Therefore man was banished from Eden, and a flaming sword was set to guard the tree of life, and to keep him from this additional calamity.

Without the tree of life, man's body became mortal and subject to death because of sin. This death was not immediate, but sentence was suspended for a time. Man was placed on probation, in order that he might have opportunity to repent, to accept the atonement of Christ, and to shape a new character by means of repentance, spiritual re-birth, and wise and godly choices in all the experiences of mortal life. Probation became a time in which to prepare to meet God.

The atonement and redemption prepared from the foundation of the world through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, could not be forced on unwilling men. God never violates man's agency. Redemption could be had only on condition that man would repent, and accept the redemption so freely offered through Jesus Christ as Savior. No man can begin to build a good life and a godly character until he is willing to forsake the old; and God will not, indeed can not grant pardon or forgiveness to one who is still rebellious and unrepentant.

The atonement and redemption of Christ are God's gifts, freely offered to every man; man does not, can not earn them. We are saved by God's grace, not by our own works. The atonement of Christ is efficacious for all men to this extent, that every man who ever lived will some day be restored to a new and immortal body, and brought into the presence of God. Will he be able to remain there? That depends on what each man did during the days of his probation on earth -- on his works. Those who have repented, and who have used the probation of this life to learn to do well, to build Christ-like characters, to form good habits and root out bad ones, to do the works of righteousness and shun the works of wickedness, to learn to love truth and mercy, and to hate evil -- all these will have prepared themselves in some degree to meet God.

All men will not be able to receive

the same degree of the presence of God in his perfection and bright glory, even though by accepting Christ's atonement they escape the second death of eternal separation from God. All men will not have made the same degree of preparation to meet God. Therefore each man will receive that degree of God's glory which he had prepared himself to receive during the probation of this life. Some who have been diligent in their probation will be welcomed into the fullness of his presence, in celestial glory. Some, who have not been so thorough or so diligent in their preparation during the probation of this life, will receive the fullness of Christ, the Son, but not the fullness of the Father. And still others, who have been even less diligent, and who are still more poorly prepared, will be able to receive only the presence of the Holy Spirit. And last of all there will be those who have procrastinated their day of decision, or refused to accept Christ or make any preparation at all -- who have wasted and dissipated the days of their probation. For them it will be everlastingly too late, just as surely as it is too late to plant corn on the first of November in Iowa.

Latter Day Saints believe that the heathen nations and those who died without the law will have opportunity to hear Christ preached in the spirit world, to accept him and his atonement. With those who have accepted Christ in the flesh they will come forth in the first resurrection. In this sense there is probation after death. But accepting Christ in the spirit world cannot change the record of their works done in the flesh. All scripture is plain and unanimous on this point -- that though we are saved by grace and not by the merit of our works, we are judged, and rewarded (or punished) according to the works done in the flesh, with consideration given to the degree of knowledge we have of God and his laws. It is in the probation of this life, and in this life only that we can make preparation to be with God.

For those who have used probation wisely, diligently, and well, all eternity will be available to achieve perfection within the limits set by their choices made on earth. But woe unto those who have the law given, and who waste the days of their probation, who neglect their preparation to meet God, who doom themselves to eternal separation from God by refusing to repent during the days of their probation; for awful is their state.